Open Education and OER
A guide and call to action for policy makers

WHAT WE VALUE

OPENNESS

Executive Summary

ALT has produced this call to action to highlight to education policy makers and professionals how Open Education and OER can expand inclusive and equitable access to education and lifelong learning, widen participation, and create new opportunities for the next generation of teachers and learners, preparing them to become fully engaged digital citizens. Open Education can also promote knowledge transfer while enhancing quality and sustainability, supporting social inclusion and creating a culture of inter-institutional collaboration and sharing.

One of ALT's three strategic aims is to increase the impact of Learning Technology for the wider community and we are issuing this call to action for policy makers to mandate that publicly funded educational resources are released under open licence to ensure that they reside in the public

domain and are freely and openly available to all. This will be of wide benefit, but in particular will enable education providers and learning technology professionals to:

1. Keep up to date with the rapid pace of technological innovation
2. Develop critical, informed approaches to the implementation of Learning Technology and the impact on learners
3. Scale up knowledge sharing and its benefits across sectors.

Contributors

This document was produced by ALT with particular contributions from Lorna Campbell, Maren Deepwell, Martin Weller and Joe Wilson.

Contents

What is Open Education and OER?

Open Education

Open Education[1] is a broad term that refers to open, distance education, as delivered by the likes of the Open University, and more recently has come to be used as an umbrella term to cover open educational resources (OER), open educational practice, open textbooks, open licensing, open assessment practices, open online courses, MOOCs, open data, Open Access scholarly works, open source software, and open standards.

Open Education encompasses resources, tools and practices that are free of legal, financial and technical barriers and can be fully used, shared and adapted in the digital environment[2]. There is a growing evidence base that this improves access and enhances the effectiveness of education globally[3].

Open Education is not just about cost savings and easy access to openly licensed content; it's about participation and co-creation and it is rooted in the human right to access high-quality education[4].

Open Educational Resources

Open Educational Resources, or OER, are central to Open Education. UNESCO defines open educational resources as

> "teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open license that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions."[5]

Open Educational Resources (OER) support quality education that is equitable, inclusive, open and participatory.[6] Crucial in their definition is that they are not just online resources, but that they are openly licensed, so they can be adapted, shared and reused.

Open Licences

What makes OER distinct from just any online material, is the presence of an open licence, that explicitly permits various forms of reuse. The most widespread open licences used to release OER are Creative Commons licences. Creative Commons is a global nonprofit organization that enables sharing and reuse of creativity and knowledge through the provision of free legal tools[7]. There are seven different Creative Commons licences which allow different degrees of reuse.

Creative Commons licences are not "against copyright", they depend on the existence of copyright

---

[1] Global OER Graduate Network, Openness and Education: A beginners guide, https://www.slideshare.net/GO-GN/openness-and-education-a-beginners-guide
[2] SPARC, Open Education, https://sparcopen.org/open-education/
[3] Open Education Week, What is Open Education Week? https://www.openeducationweek.org/page/what-is-open-education
[4] OER Commons, The Movement, https://www.oercommons.org/about
[5] UNESCO, 2012 Paris OER Declaration, http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/events/calendar-of-events/events-websites/world-open-educational-resources-congress/
[6] UNESCO, Ljubljana OER Action Plan, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ljubljana_oer_action_plan_2017.pdf
[7] Creative Commons, About CC, https://creativecommons.org/faq/#what-is-creative-commons-and-what-do-you-do

to work. Creative Commons licenses are legal tools that creators and other rights holders can use to offer certain usage rights to the public, while reserving other rights[8]. There are established CC licence models available in all of the UK jurisdictions.

Open Textbooks

Open Textbooks are textbooks that have been released under open licence and can be freely and openly distributed, used, reused and adapted by teachers and learners at little or no cost. Open Textbooks are regarded as a form of OER. Electronic copies of Open Textbooks are generally free of charge, though a small fee may be charged to print hard copies on demand. Open Textbooks are prevalent in the US where textbook costs are high and courses are often reliant on a single core textbook. Although UK education is less reliant on textbooks, Open Textbooks still have the potential to offer cost savings to learners and academic libraries either used as a whole or as disaggregated content used to support specific learning outcomes.[9]

MOOCs

MOOCs are Massive Open Online Courses that are available to the general public and can be accessed online. Although they may be regarded as part of the Open Education landscape, the "open" in MOOCs is very different from the "open" in OER. Courses are generally free to participate in, though many are increasingly charging for completion certificates, extended access to resources, and other premium features. Most MOOCs are hosted on commercial platforms and many restrict access to course materials. Course content may be released under open licence, but often it is not, meaning it cannot be reused.

Open Access

Open Access primarily refers to the publication of scholarly works, and is about making the products of research freely accessible to all. Increasingly Open Access has come to encompass a wide range of research   outputs, including research data and tools, as well as publications. It allows research to be disseminated quickly and widely, the research process to operate more efficiently, and increased use and understanding of research by business, government, charities and the wider public[10].

Research Councils UK have a Policy on Open Access[11] that requires peer-reviewed research articles, which acknowledge Research Council funding, to be published in Open Access journals that are compliant with this policy. This mandatory Open Access policy applies *only* to peer reviewed research papers, not teaching and learning resources, however the Open Access movement shares many goals with Open Education. It is anomalous that while publicly funded research is mandatorily open there is no similar encouragement for learning resources to be openly available.

Why does Open Education matter?

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all people have the right to education (Article 26) and the freedom to receive and impart information and ideas through any media, regardless of frontiers (Article 19)[12]. These rights are supported by the 17 Goals of the United Nations Sustainable

---

[8] Ibid.
[9] UK Open Textbooks Project, http://ukopentextbooks.org/
[10] HEFCE, What is Open Access?, http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa/whatis/
[11] RCUK, Policy on Open Access and Supporting Guidance, http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/openaccess/policy/
[12] United Nations, Universal Declaration of HUman Rights, http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

Development Agenda[13].

Open Education and OER have a central role to play in supporting Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education which calls for the international community to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"[14] with its key pillars of access, equity and inclusion.

Open Education can make a significant contribution to closing the attainment gap, developing digital skills, improving the assessment process, creating new opportunities for learners, sharing resources and experiences between education and industry, and supporting the richness and diversity of learning envisioned in UK and Scottish Government education policies and initiatives.

Expanding demand for higher education and decreasing prevalence of the 'traditional' 18-22 year old student undertaking a full time degree on campus, is creating a need for more flexible higher education offerings. Open Education is not the only means to address these challenges, but it does offer a range of solutions, including expanding the curriculum, offering more flexible pathways into learning, and facilitating adaptable education that meets the needs of the growing digital economy.

Why we need OER Policy?

UNESCO clearly sets out the need for OER policy in the 2017 Ljubljana OER Action Plan[15].

For OER to reach its full transformative potential it needs to be an integral part of educational policies and practices from early childhood education to post-secondary, higher education and lifelong learning. Mainstreaming OER-based content will depend upon a commitment to openness and access from governments, institutions, teachers and learners.

In order for Open Education and OER to reach this potential and to benefit from economies of scale a supportive policy environment is critical. It is not sufficient to allow sectors and institutions to adopt an ad hoc approach to open licensing. The UNESCO OER Action Plan encourages governments to have clear policy frameworks that inform the activities of all institutions and individuals who commission and create publically funded learning content. Within this policy framework we can;

1. Build the capacity of all teachers, learners and educators to find, re-use, create and share OER
2. Overcome language and cultural barriers
3. Ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality OER
4. Create sustainable national models

With sensible measured action on Open Education and OER, policy makers can improve the learning experience for all and help to develop the skills and capacity of all those individuals and institutions creating publicly funded educational resources. Open Education is a global movement which many nations are committing to and a number of countries already have national policy initiatives in place.

Greater access to learner focused OER can help to bridge the learning experience between primary, secondary, further and higher education and close the divide between academic and vocational learning.

---

[13] United Nations, Sustainable Development Agenda, http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/
[14] United Nations, Sustainable Development Goal 4: Education, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4
[15] UNESCO, Ljubljana OER Action Plan, https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ljubljana_oer_action_plan_2017.pdf

Increased use of open licences for public heritage collections will also enable galleries, libraries, archives, museums and other public bodies to open up their collections and make a greater contribution to the education sector.

It will also support informal learners in the community or in work-based learning scenarios. Action here will directly support formal and informal learning and indirectly support existing policies on digital literacy and information literacy needed in a knowledge based economy.

Formulating OER policy will enable UK government and institutions to align themselves with UNESCO policy and UN Sustainable Development Goals and to be seen as a positive contributor to global learning, benefitting the profile of the education system internationally.

While investing in Open Education policy is not cost neutral, the focus should be on making better and more cost effective use of the learning assets that exist across the public sector and in establishing a more sustainable system.

Next Steps

There is scope for a more structured response to the UNESCO OER Action Plan from the UK Government and from the devolved administrations across the UK.
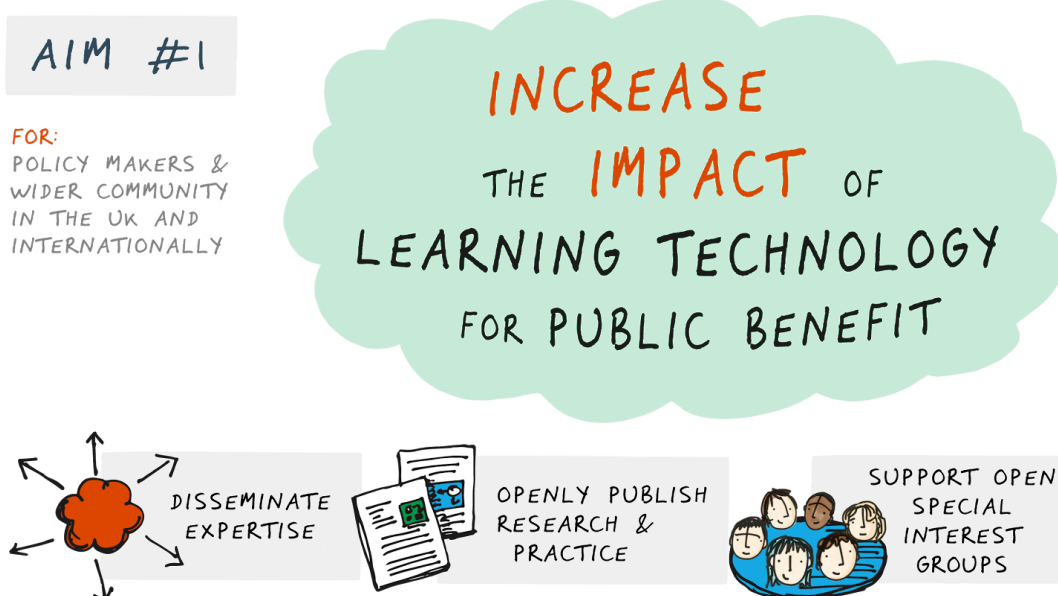
In all UK administrations a coherent approach to the 14 principles of the UNESCO Action Plan will involve working across a number of departmental portfolios while engaging with a broad range of stakeholder organisations. Efficiencies in sharing and production of educational content will be realised most effectively when a national approach is taken, in order to ensure that resources can be used across sectors.

A suggested approach would be through supporting or hosting a number of policy forums with key decision makers, focused on reaching consensus and formulating a policy action plan for embedding the principles of the UNESCO OER Action Plan into both UK and devolved administration policy frameworks. We would welcome the opportunity to support such an action alongside other organisations and contribute to it.

About the Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

Founded in 1993, the Association for Learning Technology (ALT) represents over 3000 individual and organisational Members from all sectors and parts of the UK. Our Membership includes practitioners, researchers and policy makers with an interest in Learning Technology. Our community grows more diverse as Learning Technology has become recognised as a fundamental part of learning, teaching and assessment.

Our charitable objective is "to advance education through increasing, exploring and disseminating knowledge in the field of Learning Technology for the benefit of the general public". We have led professionalisation in Learning Technology since 1993.

AIM #1

FOR:
POLICY MAKERS &
WIDER COMMUNITY
IN THE UK AND
INTERNATIONALLY

INCREASE THE IMPACT OF LEARNING TECHNOLOGY FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT

DISSEMINATE EXPERTISE

OPENLY PUBLISH RESEARCH & PRACTICE

SUPPORT OPEN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

What we value and what we do

Our current strategy sets out our aims for 2017-2020:
Increasing the impact of Learning Technology for the wider community, strengthening recognition and representation for the Membership at a national level and leading professionalisation for individual Learning Technology professionals in a broad range of roles.

At the heart of our approach is a strong belief in the value of openness, and this is reflected in the way we operate as an Association, in our policy work, and the activities of our Membership. Our Members advocate open practice and support open publication, for example via our Open Access journal *Research in Learning Technology*, the #altc blog and the Open Education Special Interest Group.

How we define Learning Technology

We define Learning Technology as the broad range of communication, information and related technologies that can be used to support learning, teaching and assessment. Our community is made up of people who are actively involved in understanding, managing, researching, supporting or enabling learning with the use of Learning Technology.

We work across the UK and beyond

ALT is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), registered with the Charity Commission in the UK, number 1160039. We represent Members from all parts of the UK, including the devolved nations. We work together with other professional bodies and sector organisations in the UK in order to achieve our aims and generate the strongest impact for our Members.

Learning Technology research and practice expands beyond national frontiers, and in order to serve our Membership as effectively as possible we collaborate actively with a global network of partners. We welcome international liaison and always seek new ways to help inform and connect our community more widely.

Resources

- Cape Town Open Education Declaration +10 http://www.capetowndeclaration.org/cpt10/
- Creative Commons Education Platform https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/education-oer/
- EU Opening up Education: A Support Framework for Higher Education Institutions https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/opening-education-support-framework-higher-education-institutions
- EU Policy Recommendations for Opening Up Education https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/open-education
- Hewlett Foundation OER Strategy https://www.hewlett.org/strategy/open-educational-resources/
- OECD OER A Catalyst for Innovation http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/open-educational-resources_9789264247543-en
- OER Hub http://oerhub.net/
- Open Education Consortium Information Center http://www.oeconsortium.org/info-center/
- Open Scotland http://openscot.net/
- Opening Educational Practices in Scotland Final Report https://oepscotland.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/oeps-final-report-web.pdf
- Scottish Open Education Declaration http://declaration.openscot.net/
- UNESCO Ljubljana OER Action Plan and Ministerial Declaration http://en.unesco.org/news/ljubljana-oer-action-plan-2017-adopted-support-quality-open-licensed-educational-resources
- UNESCO Paris OER Declaration http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/open-educational-resources/what-is-the-paris-oer-declaration/
- United Nations SDG4 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4